

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Regents

From: Board Office

Subject: Re-accreditation of the University of Northern Iowa by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

Date: January 7, 2002

Recommended Actions: Receive the report.

Executive Summary: At its meeting on October 1, 2001, the Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools voted to continue the accreditation of the University of Northern Iowa for a maximum ten-year period.

Criteria for Accreditation The University met the General Institutional Requirements as well as the criteria for accreditation:

- clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate to an institution of higher education;
- effectively organized human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish those purposes;
- evidence of accomplishing its educational and other purposes;
- potential to continue to accomplish its purpose and strengthen its educational effectiveness; and
- demonstration of integrity in its practices and relationships.

Visiting Team Report The visiting team noted six strengths and five challenges. The next comprehensive evaluation will be in 2010-2011. A monitoring report on the status of the General Education program and its assessment must be submitted to the North Central Association by October 1, 2004.

Link to Strategic Plan: This report addresses the following Key Result Area (KRA) in the Board's Strategic Plan:

KRA 1.0.0.0	Become the best public education enterprise in the United States.
Action Step 1.1.3.2	Report data in the relevant governance reports and presentations to the Board.

KRA 4.0.0.0

Meet the objectives of the Board and institutional strategic plans and provide effective stewardship of the institutions' state, federal, and private resources.

Background:
Value of
Accreditation

Institutional accreditation by one of the six regional accrediting bodies recognized by the U. S. Department of Education is considered of major importance. It is a basic criterion for a university's eligibility to receive most federal funding, including student financial aid.

Re-accreditation
Process:

In 1991, the University of Northern Iowa received institutional accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools for a ten-year period. In order to meet the requirements for continued accreditation in 2001, UNI was required to prepare and submit a comprehensive self-study that provided extensive information about the faculty, curriculum, students, facilities, and other factors that addressed the 24 General Institutional Requirements and five criteria established by the North Central Association. The self-study contains the changes at the University since the 1991 evaluation team's visit, specifically describing how the NCA's concerns have been addressed.

Self-Study

Re-Accreditation
Process:

NCA appointed a broad-based team of eight external evaluators to verify the accuracy and completeness of the self-study and to conduct a three-day site visit at the campus on February 19-21, 2001. Prior to their visit, team members reviewed the self-study and other documents, including the University's 2001-2006 Strategic Plan (*Focused on Excellence*); catalogues; faculty, staff, and student handouts; official financial reports; and the 1991 NCA report. While on campus, the team had access to a wide variety of additional documents, including personnel records, course syllabi, and deans' and departmental reports.

On-Site Visit

In conducting the on-site evaluation, the team members consulted extensively with institutional officials, faculty, students, institutional organizations, Board of Regents members, and community representatives.

The visiting team issued a 61-page report of its comprehensive visit. The team found that the University was in compliance with the General Institutional Requirements and the accreditation criteria. The report identified institutional strengths, noted challenges, and made recommendations for NCA action. The report also included advice and suggestions, which are not related directly to the University's accreditation.

Analysis: As a result of its comprehensive self-study and an on-site peer review, the Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and School voted to continue the accreditation of the University of Northern Iowa for the maximum ten-year period. The University is required to submit a monitoring report to NCA on the status of the General Education program and its assessment by October 1, 2004.

Team Comments “The Self-Study report was well written, readable, and informative. It was obvious that the Self-Study was a campus-wide effort. The report provided a useful description and a good sense of the University, including strengths and challenges facing the institution. Of particular note was the University’s narrative response to twenty-two evaluative comments taken from the 1991 Report, along with a report of progress made and new initiatives undertaken since the 1991 NCA review. Members of the team were unanimous in their view that the University does meet the criteria for continued accreditation.”

Strengths Strengths are intended to commend the University and to encourage continued good practice in the future.

1. The Board of Regents is knowledgeable and supportive of the University. Faculty and staff are innovative, creative, and enthusiastic. Students demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to the University.
2. UNI is a fiscally sound and dynamically managed University. Planning and program review are integrated and guide University budget decisions. The budget process has become decentralized and is highly participative.
3. UNI has been supported in appropriations by the State of Iowa in a manner that has allowed the University to maintain relatively small classes, address course availability, and continue to develop new program initiatives without significantly large tuition increases.
4. My UNiVerse, the student portal project, provides multiple options for student decision-making within the University environment.
5. The UNI Overseas Recruiting Fair is an annual event involving over 100 overseas schools from 60 countries, all looking for UNI teacher education graduates to work abroad.

6. Some newer facilities, including the Curris Business Building, the Wellness Recreation Center, and the Performing Arts Center, are state-of-the-art and serve the campus and community well. Renovation of existing facilities has maintained the architectural integrity of the campus and provides much needed state-of-the-art space.
-

Challenges

Challenges are intended to indicate those areas that need attention.

No. 1

The University's efforts toward reaching diversity goals set by the Board of Regents are ambitious and should be commended. However, the challenge of using State resources to reach such goals may be compromised through competing priorities. Every effort should be made by the University to energize its recruitment strategy as a means of enhancing the quality of the overall educational experience.

Response

Progress towards the Board's diversity goal continues to be a high priority. The University is focusing on both recruitment and retention through enhanced collaboration of the Academic Affairs and Educational and Student Services divisions.

No. 2

There is a need to better integrate the assessment of student academic achievement, through outcomes assessment, across an integrated General Education curriculum. The unevenness of assessment activities across the program compromises the effectiveness of evaluating an integrated curriculum.

Response

The University identified, as an institutional challenge, the need to continue to strengthen the impact and integration and to improve assessment of its General Education program in the 2000 NCA Self-Study.

Some examples of progress made during the past three years include:

- *Summer institutes for faculty in Humanities and the Capstone course to enhance teaching and integrate more extensive use of technology in their courses.*
- *Inclusion of a "Statement on Liberal Learning" and General Education category goals in the 2000-2002 UNI catalogue.*
- *Completion of a marketing study of the General Education program by senior level marketing students that identified the need to communicate better the importance and purposes of the General Education program to both students and faculty.*

- *Changing the name of the General Education program to Liberal Arts Core (as recommended by the student marketing study and supported by the faculty).*
- *Development of General Education cluster courses that integrate four courses in the General Education program.*
- *Appointment of an administrative Coordinator for the General Education program who is responsible for providing leadership for issues related to General Education.*

To address specifically the issues of assessment of the General Education program, the Provost has appointed a special sub-committee of the General Education Committee, chaired by the Coordinator of General Education. This sub-committee is conducting a series of meetings and consultations throughout Fall 2001 and Spring 2002 with the intent to provide recommendations to the Provost for improving new assessment processes at the end of the Spring term.

No. 3 The current approach to the General Education program compromises its coherence and effectiveness. The existing structure creates a leadership gap and compromises coherence leading to a fragmented program.

Response The University plans to address this challenge as part of the measures implemented to address Challenge #2.

No. 4 While there is a five-year plan for additions and renovations in place, there are some facilities that are not addressed in the plan for which there is concern.

Response The University prioritizes projects in its capital improvement plan. Undoubtedly, there are additional concerns that cannot be accommodated on the five-year list. Every effort is made to address these concerns through other mechanisms, such as private fundraising and the building repair list.

No. 5 Resources allocated for equipment acquisition, maintenance, and repair are inadequate.

Response This situation has grown worse because of the budget reductions this year. The University plans to address this concern as funds allow.

Advice and
Suggestions

Members of the visiting team serve as both evaluators and consultants. As consultants, the team offered advice and suggestions that do not relate directly to the University's accreditation.

1. The Information Technology Services at UNI are highly decentralized, where each college and division has its own computing staff and budget. While such a structure provides considerable autonomy and personalized service to the academic unit, it may also provide less efficiency of resources by dispersing facilities, personnel, and space. The University may wish to consider an alternative approach to this arrangement.
2. Although the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching provides a vital service and plays a major role toward the support of the University's instructional mission through collaborative faculty development opportunities, the Center may wish to include department heads and other academic administrators in faculty development activities as an avenue of cross fertilization.
3. Office space, laboratory space, and space for generalized academic use is a generic problem across the campus. The University may wish to consider the development of a long-term Space and Facility Plan to support the anticipated growth of students and faculty in the future.
4. In an effort to more effectively support the University's quest for excellence and the teacher-scholar model, the institution may give thought to creating stronger incentive and reward mechanisms for integrating good teaching, scholarship, and student learning with faculty performance.

Other Qualities
Noted in Team
Report

There were other qualities noted throughout the visiting team's report, including the following:

- Board members' knowledge of University initiatives and long-range plans for UNI and other Regent institutions;
- A stable and very capable administration;
- A level of mutual respect among the members of the President's Cabinet that is productive and beneficial to the campus;
- The President's leadership to the executive team and delegation of appropriate levels of responsibility;
- A track record of strong leadership and active involvement in student and campus-related governance by the Student Government;
- Institutional development and the success of capital campaigns since 1970; able leadership in the Foundation;

- A physical facility that is supportive of teaching and learning;
- The alignment of the organization and structure of the University's educational program and support areas with the institution's mission and purpose driven by a well-defined strategic plan and supported by a sound financial base;
- Well-defined academic programs with rigor and standards of excellence serving as beacons of academic integrity;
- The University's commitment to a broad liberal education that serves as the foundation for professional education and that is reflected in the structure and content of its General Education curriculum;
- Strong faculty credentials; a very strong commitment to teaching as a priority;
- The placement record for the College of Natural Sciences;
- Energy and enthusiasm among the students and faculty about graduate education;
- A significant increase in minority enrollment in the Graduate College during the past decade;
- The Museum's educational opportunities for students, through internships, class visits, assignments, or for personal growth, providing a "value added" educational experience for students;
- Beautiful Library that is well maintained and designed with many areas suitable for individual or group study, including a welcoming ambiance. Since the last accreditation review, the Library has shown considerable improvement in several areas noted in the previous NCA review, e.g., space and size of periodical collections;
- The Center for the Enhancement of Teaching that provides a very important support role to the teaching mission of the University;
- Integration of student outcomes assessment with planning and program review bringing focus to the functional interaction of those three components to academic programming;
- Well documented learning outcomes and competencies for each of the six focal areas in the General Education curriculum; learning outcomes and competencies for the courses in each of the areas;
- Commitment of the Division of Educational and Student Services to high quality student care and an eagerness for creative changes toward the improvement of services to students and the surrounding community;
- Well-managed Maucker Union;
- Strong orientation of the athletic program toward student success; mainstreaming of student athletes into the general student body where educational goals take priority;

- Physical resources that are supportive of the institution's mission and strategic goals;
- Well-established personnel and student policies and procedures that serve to guide and govern the rights and responsibilities of all its constituents;
- Success rate of competitive proposals;
- Primary faculty responsibility for the University's curriculum, including program development, program review, standards for degrees and academic credit, and most academic policy matters; and
- Institutional integrity in terms of practices and constituent relationships.

Institutional
Response to
Report

The University was given an opportunity to respond to the on-site visit report, object to any factual errors in the report, and submit additional materials to document its compliance with accreditation standards. The institution agreed with the team's recommendations regarding continued accreditation and submission of a monitoring report on the status of the General Education program.

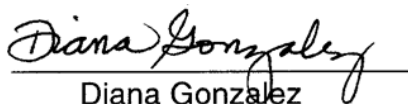
NCA Action

The North Central Association's Higher Learning Commission reviewed all of the information submitted on behalf of the University's request for reaccreditation and took formal action to award reaccreditation on October 1, 2001.

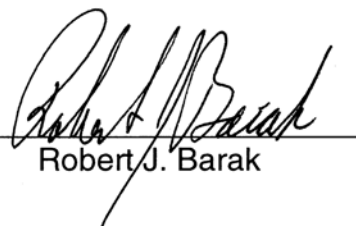
The University received accreditation for the maximum ten-year period. A progress report on the status of UNI's General Education program and its assessment must be provided to the Higher Learning Commission in October 2004.

Copy of Materials

A complete copy of the materials on this accreditation action, including the self-study, on-site visiting team report, institutional response, and letter of formal notification of accreditation, is on file in the Board Office.


Diana Gonzalez

Approved:


Robert J. Barak